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Health care: Tell us what YOU think

By LANCE HAVER

DID YOU PAY more for health care this year than last? Getting less coverage? Maybe you're scared because you don't have insurance at all.

As last week's *Daily News* noted, health care is the No. 1 troubling issue for Americans. That shouldn't be a surprise - there may be more than 40 million Americans without health insurance, 9 million of whom are children.

Since 2000, the average cost of health insurance has gone up more than 40 percent. It now costs an average family almost \$10,000 a year. America, the richest nation on earth, is one of the few countries that doesn't have universal health care. And it's having a devastating impact - as premiums skyrocket, more and more manufacturers are sending jobs overseas.

Right here in Philadelphia, health insurance has been a key issue in labor negotiations for both city workers and SEPTA employees. And people die as a result of not having health insurance. Last year, the Institute of Medicine estimated that 18,000 people died because they didn't have any coverage.

Do you ever wish you had a chance to tell the government a thing or two about what should be done about health care? If you call **215-685-5698**, you can sign up to participate in a Community Roundtable on Health Care on April 10.

The event is an activity of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, a national non-partisan group charged with listening to the views of the American people and developing recommendations for the president and Congress to provide "health care that works for all Americans."

Roundtables have already been held across the country, and now it's Philadelphia's turn. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is encouraging Philadelphians, particularly those who are uninsured or underinsured, to share their ideas.

All too often, all President Bush hears from is hand-picked audiences. This is our chance to speak out about our own vision for the kind of health care we want. Unless ordinary people like us take part in this discussion, it's likely that "solutions" to the health-care crisis will come from lobbyists and focus on misguided strategies like "consumer-driven" health care, health savings accounts and deregulation.

Just think of what it might sound like if we treat health care like shopping: "Honey, before we take Dad to the emergency room, let's call a few hospitals and see what they charge - who knows, maybe one of them is having a special on heart attacks this week." It would be a shame if we allow the spokespeople for the drug and health care industry to control the discussion.

The roundtable will focus on questions like what kind of system you want, how we should pay for it, and who should have health care. The trickiest question will be "What trade-offs are you willing to make in either benefits or financing to ensure access to affordable, high quality health care coverage and services?"

This question suggests that to get universal health care, we would have to give something up. But it doesn't really say what the something is. For example, are we willing to give up tax cuts to the richest 1 percent to pay for health care? Withdraw our troops from Iraq and use the money to fund health care? Unless we tell our government what we want, the government will continue to give us what they want. Surely, Philadelphians know better. *

• *Community Roundtable, April 10, 4-8 p.m. (registration at 3:30) at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, 19 S. 22nd St.*

You must pre-register at Citizenshealthcare.gov/register, or call 215-685-5698. Refreshments will be served. If you can't make the roundtable, log on to Citizenshealthcare.gov from your home or a public library. Make sure they hear from more than their handpicked friends.

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